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SUBJECT: BELARUS WEEKLY POL/ECON REPORT - September 12, 2008

11. The following are brief items of interest compiled by Embassy Minsk.

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##### Civil Society

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#### 12. Opposition Youth Expelled From University

Malady Front activist Rostislav Pankratov was expelled from Mogilev University on September 10. Pankratov linked the expulsion to his political activities and dismissed allegations that he failed to pass his exams. In a separate case, the same university administration expelled history department student and Belarusian Christian Democracy party member Tatyana Shambolova on September 5 for political reasons and because she is a candidate for parliament. Both students maintained they would continue to pursue education in Belarus.

#### 13. Central Election Commission Challenges Eight Registration Denials

On September 5, the Central Election Commission (CEC) announced that it had challenged eight out of 51 parliamentary hopefuls' registration denials. Twenty-three opposition candidates filed appeals, and the CEC turned down four registration denials of opposition candidates. CEC Chairwoman Lidiya Yermoshina stated that the CEC would have liked to challenge more denials from "a moral point of view," however, she said that because such cases are based

on legal grounds, they could not be reconsidered.

#### 14. Supreme Court Overturns Two Registration Denial Appeals

On September 11, the Supreme Court concluded hearings on 19 appeals filed by unregistered parliamentary hopefuls. It overturned only two denial decisions on September 9. The most prominent opposition members running for parliament were denied registration.

#### 15. Opposition Continually Faces Arbitrary Detentions

Police briefly detained United Civic Party activists Natalya Schukina and Aleksandr Protsko in Gomel on September 6. The activists were distributing leaflets calling for a boycott of the parliamentary elections and were released without charge. In a separate incident in Gomel, parliamentary hopeful Konstantin Zhukovskiy and his proxies Sergey Trifonov and Ales Sivakov were apprehended for two hours September 9 after Zhukovskiy recorded his electoral program speech for local TV and radio channels. The TV channel's administration accused the proxies of "illegally" videotaping Zhukovskiy's speech and alleged that they believed the proxies were carrying a bomb.

#### 16. Opposition Parliamentary Hopeful Fined

On September 10, a Borisov city court fined Belarusian Popular Front member and unregistered parliamentary hopeful Sergey Salash USD 415. Salash was charged with slandering a local electoral commission secretary and the Deputy Chairman of the District Executive Committee. The activist said he was not "surprised" by the fine and would appeal it to a higher court.

#### 17. Opposition Leaders Detained and Searched

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Border guards at the Belarus-Lithuania border detained for several hours and thoroughly searched For Freedom Movement leader Aleksandr Milinkevich and Belarusian Christian Democracy party Co-chairman Pavel Severinets on September 5. Milinkevich and Severinets were returning to Belarus from a conference on the upcoming parliamentary elections held in Vilnius. Law enforcers confiscated printed materials and copies of an opposition documentary from them.

#### 18. Opposition Youth Sentenced to Jail

On September 5, a Minsk district court sentenced Malady Front activist Vadim Khonyavko to 15 days in jail for allegedly drinking in public. Police apprehended Khonyavko the same day and charged him with petty hooliganism. Khonyavko has been active in the MF campaign to boycott the upcoming elections.

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Domestic Economy  
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#### 19. Consumer Inflation Increases in August

Economic news portals reported September 11 that Belarus' consumer price inflation increased by 0.17 percent on the month in August. January-August 2008 saw an 8.28 percent inflation rate as compared with 4.4 percent in January-August 2007. Overall, consumer prices have increased by 16.2 percent in the last 12 months.

#### 110. Belarus' GDP Up 10.6 Percent

On September 11, the Statistics Agency reported that Belarus' GDP grew 10.6 percent on the year in January-August, reaching USD 37.16 bln. Industrial output increased by 13.1 percent and farm output by 7.4 percent. The GDP growth rate is expected to reach approximately 11-12 percent in 2008.

#### 111. Belarus Has Record High Grain Harvest

The Ministry of Agriculture reported a record high harvest of 9.297 mln tons of grain as of September 8. Private households farmed 0.2

percent less grain on the year in 2008, and state farms increased their harvests by 27.3 percent. Sugar beet crops went down 30.1 percent; potato production also fell by 40.3 percent.

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Foreign Trade  
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12. Belarus-China Trade Continues To Rise

Business media sources announced September 11 that trade between Belarus and China rose by 26.9 percent on the year to USD 581.3 mln in January-May 2008. Exports fell 47.2 percent to USD 102.3 mln, and imports from China hiked 81.2 percent to USD 479 mln. PM Sergey Sidorskiy stated at a meeting with the outgoing Chinese Ambassador to Belarus on September 11 that trade could potentially reach USD 1.5 bln in 2008. The Ambassador noted that China endorses Belarus' domestic reforms and "foreign political initiatives."

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Quote of the Week  
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13. Speaking at a press conference with a group of visiting Russian journalists on September 8, President Lukashenko pondered his style of governance, saying:

"One has to accurately calculate before making a decision. And then, of course, comes rigid control - that is the nature of that authoritarianism as I see it. Who the hell knows what authoritarianism is?"

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